'Green Government Challenge' to provide localities with carbon emissions yardstick

BEGINNING THIS MONTH – and throughout 2008 – the Virginia Municipal League will provide its member local governments with helpful information and practical strategies designed to promote environmental responsibility.

By Jay Fisette

VML's "Go Green Virginia" initiative, endorsed by the league's Executive Committee, recognizes that communities need to take innovative steps to reduce energy usage and promote sustainability.

The scientific community has reached a near consensus regarding global climate change. Earth is undeniably warming. This warming is principally the result of carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases from human activities. These human activities include burning fossil fuels (electricity generation and vehicles) and significant changes in land use (tree cutting and sprawl).

If the trends in greenhouse gas emissions continue, by the end of the 21st century global temperatures could increase by as much as 10 degrees. This warming would have significant consequences, such as submerging coastal areas, increasing the risk of droughts, floods and coastal storms, and severely threatening biodiversity and public health.

And for global warming skeptics, there is equally disturbing news. Our country's dependence on oil, especially foreign oil, continues to be staggering. Consider: the United States, with 5 percent of the world's population, uses about 25 percent of its oil. Consider: The United States consumes about 20 million barrels of oil a day, but only about 6 million of those barrels are produced at home. And in the past three years the price of a barrel of oil has risen from $43 to $100.

Just as the Earth's environment is fragile, the supply of oil and other fossil fuels is finite. According to some economists, without significant cultural reform this dependence will continue to hamper economic growth and eventually could have dire economic and social consequences when world oil production peaks but demand continues to rise. These consequences would be worldwide.

The need to "think globally, act locally" has never been more appropriate. Local governments must begin to find energy efficiencies and sustainable land use policies to ensure their future quality of life. A number of states, including Virginia, as well as organizations such as the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties, are adopting policies and taking steps to address the problems. Many cities, towns and counties across Virginia are beginning to take action, too.

VML is poised to help its member local governments join in this important undertaking. Our "Go Green Virginia" initiative has several components that will unfold throughout the year, including a series of educational forums that will be held across the state this spring and publication of a "best practices" green book.

Most importantly, member local governments will be asked to participate in a friendly competition known as the Green Government Challenge. The "Challenge" is designed to encourage implementation of specific environmental policies and practical actions that reduce the carbon emissions generated by both the local government and the broader community. In addition, taking these actions can save local governments money.

The Green Government Challenge will work like this: Local governments will earn "green points" by implementing or adopting policies and actions listed in 11 categories. These categories will include: Adoption of Governmental Policy, Energy Efficiency, Green Buildings, Waste Management, Vehicles, Land Use/Transportation, Water/Air Quality, Employee Incentives, Education/Community participation, Schools and Innovation. Amassing at least 100 "green points" out of a possible 200 will earn a certification as a "Green Government." In addition, awards will be given to the top three jurisdictions in each of three population brackets (less than 15,000; 15,001-90,000; 90,001-plus). These awards and certificates will be presented at the 2008 VML Annual Conference.

While information regarding the Challenge will be mailed to members, local governments will register to participate on-line at www.GoGreenVA.org beginning at the end of January. Once registered, local governments can start completing the Challenge and implementing as many new actions and policies as possible. The Web site will provide detailed instructions, technical assistance and samples of actions already established by VML member jurisdictions. Refer to it often. Local governments will have until Sept. 30 to complete the Challenge and submit the necessary certification on-line or by mail.

Finally, please plan to attend one of the four Go Green Virginia regional forums this spring. Dates and locations will be announced soon. The forums will discuss many of the policies and actions described in the Challenge to achieve the "Green Government" certification, and will provide practical help for local governments to begin or advance their energy saving and sustainability efforts. I look forward to seeing you there as we work together on these important issues.

About the author

Jay Fisette is president of VML and a member of the Arlington County Board.

Reducing Virginia's carbon footprint one community at a time

By MICHELLE WYMAN

WHILE PUBLIC CONCERN about climate change skyrocketed and federal climate legislation remained in limbo this past year, local government leaders have continued to identify and implement solutions.

We are excited to share that ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) – is engaging nine cities, towns and counties in Virginia to quantify and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, ICLEI's Virginia network provides a forum for local leaders to share best practices and local climate protection resources and engage in and drive regional sustainability efforts.

While most ICLEI members in Virginia are still in the beginning stages of their work, ICLEI's Five Milestone Framework will guide them straight through to implementation and quantification of solutions. This process of assessing and reducing emissions is outlined here, along with a brief overview of the climate protection activities in the ICLEI member communities across Virginia.

ICLEI members follow the Five Milestone Methodology:

- Milestone 1: Conduct a baseline emissions inventory
- Milestone 2: Adopt an emissions reduction target
- Milestone 3: Develop a local Climate Action Plan
- Milestone 4: Implement policies and measures
- Milestone 5: Monitor and evaluate progress

Conduct a baseline emissions inventory. Conducting a baseline emissions inventory is the first step in facilitating a Climate Action Plan designed to curb pollution dramatically and increase community livability for current and future generations of Virginians.

Why conduct a greenhouse gas emissions inventory? The act of quantifying greenhouse gas emissions through extensive inventory enables local governments to identify priorities and better manage their energy use to build a solid foundation for all climate protection work. ICLEI members use the Clean Air Climate Protection (CACP) Software tool, which is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. ICLEI provides the software, ongoing technical assistance, and Web-based software trainings to its members.

- Wyman -

The overall inventory includes all sectors – commercial, industrial, residential, transportation, waste – and lends a big picture perspective as to the main sources of pollution within a jurisdiction's limits. A sector-by-sector approach also helps us focus on problem areas by revealing a detailed map of emissions sources. The resulting total count of quantified emissions gives local government officials an understanding of the kinds of reduction levels they must consider.

Adopt an emissions reduction target. The reduction target is the specific greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal that a local government aims to achieve by a designated year. It is usually expressed as a percentage reduction below the quantity of emissions released in the baseline year. Setting a target year helps local governments strive for goals that are healthy for their communities and the planet. ICLEI generally advises developing short and long-term target years such as 2012 and 2050.

Develop a local Climate Action Plan. With an understanding of emissions sources, quantities, and reduction targets, ICLEI helps guide local governments toward the best practices for their communities with a Climate Action Plan – the policies, programs, and projects that a local government will implement to meet its emissions reduction goals. Many cities choose to mark and celebrate the announcement of a Climate Action Plan and use it as a community outreach and awareness tool. For example, Blacksburg held a celebration during the city's "Sustainability Week" to announce its Climate Action Plan, which provided an excellent opportunity to engage the city's different sectors.

Implement policies and measures. Implementation is the most important step that a local government takes because this is where the reductions actually happen. It is an on-going process that will probably last through the target date – but the key point is to keep taking action until the greenhouse gas reduction goal is reached.

Monitoring and evaluating progress. Annual or biennial inventories are essential to monitor progress to adapt Climate Action Plans and shift target levels based on realistic progress. This continual process is built into the implementation of the local Climate Action Plan, and tracking progress usually creates a sense of community pride.

Virginia is taking concrete strides forward as many ICLEI members in

the state head toward major reductions in greenhouse gases.

Here are some highlights from the front lines of Virginia's local climate action:

Charlottesville just completed the first draft of its baseline study and has plans to create a "green team" for the implementation of their plan. With 17 percent of their total greenhouse gas emissions coming from streetlights, Charlottesville is looking to quickly replace street lights with energy efficient LEDs (light-emitting diodes) to save money and energy.

Albemarle County is just getting its feet on the ground with plans to partner with Charlottesville to lighten the load.

Blacksburg is in the final draft stages of its inventory with help from a Virginia Tech professor and a slew of environmentally minded students. The professor offered two semester courses on the inventory and students worked hard to inventory not only the town, but also the university itself. They found that about 35 percent of emissions in Blacksburg are attributable to Virginia Tech, and are now in the process are proposing a Climate Action Plan.

Last year, ***Warrenton*** Mayor George Fitch announced plans for construction of a large biomass plant. Since then, the town has replaced its traffic lights with energy efficient LEDs and is in the beginning phases of setting up a town energy committee. With their inventory partially complete, Warrenton is already moving forward with the design of a new "green" town Web site for citizens to learn about the changes in their community.

Students from James Madison University and Virginia Tech have teamed up to tackle the City of Roanoke's inventory and are progressing quickly. The ***City of Roanoke*** already has replaced part of the city fleet with hybrid vehicles, switched other city vehicles (such as school buses and fire trucks) to low sulfur and ultra low sulfur diesel, and upgraded municipal buildings with more energy efficient lighting and heating.

Arlington County began energy efficiency and green building programs in 2000. Since then, it has achieved reductions by improving energy efficiency in buildings and infrastructure, purchasing wind energy credits to offset some electricity use, using bio-diesel fuel in all diesel trucks, purchasing energy-efficient hybrid vehicles for the county fleet, and planting trees throughout the county.

The path forward for these Virginia local governments holds exciting opportunities to push the envelope and demonstrate that local action and leadership offer the greatest opportunity to effectively fight climate change. We hope you will join us in supporting these advances in sustainability for our communities and generations to come.

ICLEI USA is welcoming new members every day, building a robust network of local governments advancing climate protection and sustainability. Currently, ICLEI members in the state of Virginia include: The cities of Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Norfolk and Roanoke; the counties of Albemarle, Arlington and Roanoke; and the towns of Blacksburg and Warrenton.

To inquire about membership, visit www.iclei.org/usa, e-mail membership-usa@iclei.org or call 510/844-0699.

About the author

Michelle Wyman is executive director of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, U.S.A.

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability is a non-profit association of local governments – more than 350 cities, towns and counties in the U.S. and close to 1,000 worldwide – dedicated to solving environmental problems through local action. ICLEI works with its members to design and implement performance-based, results-oriented programs to address climate protection and sustainability.

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State commission grapples with climate change

By L. PRESTON BRYANT JR.

- Bryant -

FEW ENVIRONMENTAL issues have gripped our national conscience like global warming. School-age kids, college students, baby boomers, and seniors alike are increasingly aware of the climate-change phenomenon. And as climatological research is refined, a growing majority is more and more accepting of the science behind it.

Indeed, when Gov. Timothy M. Kaine addressed the first meeting of his recently appointed climate change commission, he alluded to this growing awareness, calling global warming "the environmental issue of this and the next generation."

Virginia's contributions to global warming can be calculated. The impacts of climate change on our citizens, environment and economy can be assessed. And with these calculations and assessments, we have the fundamentals to begin developing strategies to deal with it all – which is precisely the goal of the governor's commission.

What we know preliminarily is this: Greenhouse gases in Virginia come mostly from power plants and motor vehicles, with each contributing roughly a third of all emissions. The remaining third comes from industrial and manufacturing processes, solid waste disposal and agriculture. All totaled, according to the Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia produces approximately 181 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, ranking us 17th among states. Such was sufficient to inspire Gov. Kaine last summer to call for a greenhouse gas-reduction goal of 30 percent by 2025, returning emissions to 2000 levels.

Still, there are some who ask why Virginia should study that which is a global issue. There are several answers to that question.

First, Virginia is a coastal state, thereby requiring policymakers to at least assess how warming ocean temperature and resulting sea-level rise might impact our coastal resources and economy. Virginia has nearly 3,500 miles of coastline and tidal shoreline, much of which borders the most ecologically diverse wetlands and estuary in North America. Our coastal region also is home to hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of personal property and commercial, industrial, and military infrastructure.

Second, we have interior regions that comprise economically and ecologically important natural areas and working farm and forest lands. Warmer temperatures will impact the vegetation and wildlife that are part of the human food chain. We need to know how.

Last, states' actions can indeed impact the global warming phenomenon. According to the World Resources Institute, greenhouse gas emissions from Virginia and the Carolinas are equivalent to industrialized South Korea's emissions. The Northeastern states' emissions equal Canada's. And the output from just 10 mostly Midwestern states equals that of India, who we know to be one of the world's leading contributors to global warming. So, yes, states' actions to curb greenhouse gases can be globally significant.

The governor created a climate change commission that is balanced in composition and mission. It is composed of scientists, economists, environmental advocates, land-use experts, local and state policymakers, and representatives from the energy, transportation, manufacturing, and development sectors, among others. It has identifiable Republicans and Democrats, and many whose party affiliation is entirely unknown.

The commission will assess the likely impacts of climate change on Virginians' health, natural resources and economy. It also will develop strategies to meet the governor's greenhouse gas-reduction goal so that we might adapt to – and hopefully mitigate and play a role in halting – global warming's effects on the Old Dominion and beyond.

Equally important to the commission is the need to understand the costs – real, societal, and otherwise – to greenhouse gas-reduction strategies it might recommend. If we are to encourage homeowners to install energy-saving light bulbs, we should know the costs and benefits. If major utilities are to be required to install emissions-reducing technologies, we want to know what it will mean to both our heating bills and environment. If our cars are to be increasingly eco-friendly, we should know not only the sticker price effects but how it will improve our air.

Further, if we do absolutely nothing to reduce greenhouse gases in Virginia – thus letting global warming's effects on our health, environment, and economy go unchecked – then we need to know those costs, too.

Gov. Kaine has said numerous times that he prefers a coherent, workable national policy to address global warming rather than single-state or regional approaches. And if such were to be market-based, rather than overly regulatory, all the better. Unfortunately, no one sees a coherent, workable federal policy anywhere in the offing. That is why localities, states, and regions are stepping up to the plate.

Gov. Kaine's climate change commission will meet nine times over the course of the year. Its meetings will be held around the state, mostly at universities. Public input is actively sought. Its report and recommendations to the governor are due by mid-December.

About the author

L. Preston Bryant Jr. is Virginia's secretary of natural resources and chairman of Gov. Tim Kaine's climate change commission.

An introduction to responsible purchasing

By SCOT CASE

OVER THE PAST 30 years, responsible purchasing has been maturing on the fringes of the professional purchasing world. Within the last three to five years, however, responsible purchasing practices have become mainstream solutions, promoted by a wealth of professional organizations and government entities. Proponents include the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing, National Association of State Purchasing Officials, Institute for Supply Management and government purchasers at the federal, state and local levels.

Professional purchasers have continually sought to balance potentially competing purchasing goals such as price, quality and availability. Responsible purchasing increases the number of factors that must be considered by expanding the definition of quality to include human-health, environmental and social considerations. The underlying premise is that every purchase has hidden considerations that affect human health, the environment and society.

As more executives understand the connection between broader social issues and purchasing decisions, they are adopting responsible purchasing strategies designed to reduce the adverse impacts of their organization's purchasing decisions. In turn, professional purchasers are increasingly being asked to specify "green" products and services.

Getting started: The basics

Purchasers looking for ways to implement responsible purchasing can embrace any of the following strategies:

Recycled content and other factors. While recycled-content products were emphasized when the green purchasing movement began in the 1970s, green purchasing has expanded well-beyond its original exclusive focus on recycled content. Recycled-content percentages remain an important environmental indicator, but they are now recognized as only one of many environmental factors.

Purchasers today are looking at multiple environmental impacts from every phase of a product's life cycle – meaning the environmental effects of the raw materials used to make a product, the process used to make and ship them, the impacts of the products themselves and the final impacts when the product is no longer needed.

Federal agencies and many state and local governments are required to buy recycled-content products meeting the recycled-content recommendations published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA's Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines identify more than 50 categories of products that can contain recycled-content materials. For each category, EPA recommends both total recycled content and postconsumer recycled-content percentages.

Total recycled content defines the total volume of recycled materials in a product. Total recycled content includes both preconsumer (or postindustrial) recycled content and postconsumer recycled content. Preconsumer recycled content includes materials traditionally recovered from the manufacturing process that are reprocessed and used to make new products. Postconsumer recycled content refers to materials that were collected from the recycling bins found in office buildings and neighborhoods throughout the nation.

The EPA and most purchasers emphasize postconsumer recycled content over total recycled content. Many environmental standards incorporate recycled content requirements along with other important environmental considerations as part of their multi-attribute standards.

Buy energy-efficient products. If a product has a plug, it is likely that the U.S. Energy Star program has a standard to determine whether the product is energy-efficient or not. The program maintains almost 60 energy-efficiency standards covering a broad range of products routinely purchased by governments, other large organizations and individual consumers. Energy Star, for example, includes standards for products such as lighting (including traffic lights), computers, copiers and other business machines, as well as heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment.

Energy-efficient products reduce operational costs, reduce electricity consumption and lower the volume of global warming pollution. Purchasers routinely require products to meet the relevant Energy Star standard.

Buy green cleaning products. One out of three cleaning products contains ingredients that are known to cause human-health or environmental problems. Concerned with the potential threat to school children, government employees and citizens, many governments are requiring products to meet rigorous human-health and environmental criteria. New York state, for example, requires products to be certified by the EcoLogo or Green Seal programs. Illinois recently passed a similar ordinance that references EcoLogo- and Green Seal-certified cleaning products, along with products formulated in partnership with EPA's Design for the Environment program. Today, green cleaning products work just as well if not better than traditional products, without additional costs.

Buy green office equipment. Computers, copiers, scanners and other office equipment have significant environmental impacts throughout their life cycles. The raw materials used to make the products are hazardous. The processes used to make the products are energy- and water-intensive; they generate large volumes of hazardous waste. These products consume significant quantities of energy and create additional environmental hazards at the end of their useful lives when they must be carefully recycled.

Last year President George W. Bush required all computer products purchased by the federal government

to meet the EPEAT IEEE 1680 green computer standard. Many state and local governments have followed the federal government's lead.

The EPEAT green computer standard includes 23 mandatory environmental criteria and dozens of additional optional criteria. Manufacturers identify products meeting the standard on the EPEAT Web site.

The EcoLogo program has similar standards for printers, scanners, copiers and other office equipment. In all, more than 1,000 office products are EcoLogo certified.

Both EPEAT and EcoLogo standards include a product's ability to meet Energy Star requirements. Both programs, however, go well-beyond Energy Star's singular focus on energy efficiency to include multiple additional environmental considerations. To ensure greener electronic purchases, look for EPEAT-registered or EcoLogo-certified products.

Buy environmentally preferable papers. Making paper is one of the most energy- and water-intensive industries and one of the largest consumers of forest products. Environmental experts estimate that each ton of virgin (nonrecycled) paper requires 98 tons of resources to manufacture. Luckily, there are a variety of high-quality and affordable environmentally preferable papers available that significantly reduce those impacts.

While environmentally preferable papers suffered from poor performance and quality issues in the 1980s, they are now almost indistinguishable from their virgin counterparts. Purchasers routinely require papers containing postconsumer recycled content while prohibiting any materials from endangered forest systems and requiring that paper be made in mills that do not use chlorine or chlorine derivatives.

Many purchasers are able to buy environmentally preferable paper products without increasing costs. In areas of the country where there is a price difference, organizations are using double-sided printers and copiers or modern tissue dispensers that reduce paper use to offset the additional paper costs.

Proof of environmental claims. The number of products making "green" claims is skyrocketing. As several recent studies have concluded, the value of many environmental claims being made by manufacturers is suspect.

Increased purchaser scrutiny has forced some manufacturers to restate or clarify some of their environmental claims. To reduce the likelihood of being misled, purchasers are requesting third-party certification of environmental claims, which means an outside, independent auditor has verified them. Other purchasers are accepting documentation provided by the manufacturer to substantiate claims. Such documentation includes copies of test results and affidavits signed by senior company officials.

Review environmental standards. Credible environmental standards exist for many products sourced by government purchasing officials. Because the credibility of an environmental standard can be difficult to determine, look for standards that have been developed in an open, public and transparent process, such as those developed in accordance with International Organization for Standardization or American National Standards Institute procedures.

When evaluating an environmental standard, be sure to understand who developed the standard to determine if there are any conflicts of interest. Some standards developed by individual companies or trade associations, for example, tend to be less comprehensive or less demanding than standards developed by outside parties.

The most respected standards focus on multiple environmental considerations. They do not focus on any one environmental issue, such as recycled content or energy efficiency. Instead, the standards attempt to balance multiple environmental considerations gathered throughout every phase of the product's life cycle.

About the author

Scot Case has been researching and promoting responsible purchasing issues for 15 years. He is vice president of TerraChoice Environmental Marketing Inc., which manages the EcoLogo program to identify more environmentally preferable products. Reach him at scase@terrachoice.com or at 610/779-3770.

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Time has come for teleworking as staggering $100 fill-ups loom

By DIANE O'GRADY

WITH GAS PRICES at record highs, driving to work everyday is becoming more and more expensive, and for some employees, a genuine hardship.

Soaring gas prices, however, are only one reason to launch a telework program in your organization. Less traffic, less pollution and happier employees are just a few of the other reasons to get your management on board. Happier employees translate into increased employee productivity and decreased absenteeism. And should a natural or manmade disaster disrupt normal operations, telework can ensure the continuity of your operations. Who wouldn't want to take advantage of these benefits? So how do you get a program started or kicked into high gear? Below are some tips from Loudoun County, with an award winning telework program.

1. Set a goal for employee participation. The VML Green Government Challenge goal is 20 percent participation by 2010. It's achievable if your top executive is committed. Determine your first year goal, say 10 percent, and broadcast it. Employees will see a serious commitment to implement and endorse telework from top management. It helps with the "hallway talk" in the early days, when many folks may be skeptical. Front-line supervisors need assurances that this isn't a pilot program, knowing they will get top level support, and in fact, executives are expecting them to supervise teleworkers.

2. Engage your IT Department. Ideally, the teleworker's location should be viewed as an extension of the office. Many organizations choose to invest in Virtual Private Network (VPN) software to enable employees to access all their work files and systems through the Internet in a secure environment. Your IT department needs to specify standards for equipment and software and to define remote-access procedures for teleworkers. Often desktop computers are replaced with laptops as part of the standard replacement cycle in order to facilitate teleworking. Behind the scenes, IT should review current practices for data security, backup and virus protection. They should also be visible from the start in offering training on equipment and on-going support through the help-desk.

Diane O'Grady

3. Develop your telework policies and a formal telework agreement. The policies should describe who can participate and the overall work guidelines. The agreement spells out "ground rules" of the program and the specifics of the work arrangement between an employee and his/her supervisor, including how frequently the employee will telework, tasks to be completed on telework days, and the vehicle miles saved by not driving to work. Telework can be working from home as little as one full day per month. Often employees and supervisors will start with a telework arrangement that is a couple days a month or once a week for a several months, and then assess whether it's possible for the employee to telework more frequently.

4. Talk with each department. Highlight the benefits and help supervisors to identify suitable employees and tasks. Look at the work, the worker and the work unit to assist supervisors in recognizing situations where dependable workers can easily and effectively do some of their work at home. Often workers have tasks that require quiet and concentration such as writing, data analysis, research, developing Web content, contacting clients by telephone or computer programming, which are ideally suited for teleworking. These are also tasks supervisors can manage for results. Recognize that work units are "teams" and look for cross-training opportunities to provide in-office back-up for teleworkers, but also coverage for planned vacations and unexpected illnesses.

5. Provide training and support. Get the word out about how the program works, ensuring a good home work environment, helping an employee approach his/her supervisor, getting enrolled, and getting started. Announce the program through your intranet, employee manual, newsletter and executive memo. Some employees will be eager to get started; many others will have questions and wait to learn from the experience of their co-workers. Two common myths surrounding telework are that every employee will want to telework, and most teleworkers will want to work from home every day. Neither is true. You will find that telework is not a fit for everyone, and most teleworkers have a schedule with days in the office and days at home. Provide a training session for both teleworkers and their supervisors to address equipment and tools, but also underscore the importance of pre-planning, communication, performance, teamwork and trust in making this work arrangement work well for everyone.

In Loudoun County, a broad base of support for telework developed in the two years since the program was launched. Supervisors report a 20-plus percent increase in productivity among teleworkers and teleworkers report feeling less stressed and appreciative that the county cares about their well-being. In doing so, Loudoun County is contributing to a healthier, more livable and economically strong community.

Another good resource for information and support about starting a telework program, can be found at Telework!VA (www.teleworkva.org).

About the author

Diane O'Grady is a senior management analyst in the Office of the County Administrator in Loudoun.

Newport News schools cut $2.4 million from utility bills

By CATHY GRIMES
Daily Press Staff Writer

THINK YOUR ENERGY bill is a little high? Try taking on utility payments for Newport News Public Schools. Last year, the district paid $4.9 million to cover energy costs, said Keith Webb, director of plant services for the district.

But the figure could have been higher. The district shaved more than $2.4 million off those bills with assistance from its energy management system.

The School Board received an update recently on the district's ongoing energy management efforts.

"We don't have a lot of control over what we are billed ... but we do have control over what we consume," Webb said.

The district began its energy diet in 2003, hiring Ameresco, a general contractor that specializes in energy efficiency, to conduct an energy audit, estimate potential savings and develop a 12-year energy reduction program. The project cost the district $14 million, but is expected to pay for itself within 10 years with energy savings. Over the past two years, the district has pared energy costs by more than $4.7 million through a combination of better management and installation of more energy efficient appliances and systems.

To keep track of the district's energy diet, Ameresco installed a computerized energy management system throughout the district that monitors and adjusts gas and electricity use in buildings.

That plays a big role in cutting back energy costs, said district energy manager Lewis Stepp, who has been on the job since September.

The system tracks irregularities as well as routine usage. For example, if heating systems are running when school is not in session, or lights are on at night, the computer alerts the facilities staff so they can correct the problems and cut costs.

Stepp said the district began replacing boilers, water heaters and other energy hogs with more efficient models. Sedgefield Elementary School and Todd Stadium, for instance, have tankless hot water heaters, which are activated when the hot water faucet is turned on, eliminating the need to keep 300-plus gallons of water hot all day, every day.

Stepp said the district would install more tankless hot water heaters at its other elementary schools, which use less hot water than the middle and high schools.

Windows and roofs also have come under scrutiny. The district has installed tinted, energy-saving windows in several buildings. And as schools are scheduled for renovation, the district is targeting heating-air conditioning and ventilation systems and roofs for more energy-friendly replacements.

"There's still a lot of low hanging fruit to grab onto in terms of energy savings," Stepp said. "We've got to make the right choices."

One area still ripe for savings is computer use. Stepp audited the district's use of computers, monitors and printers, and said they could save more than $677,000 each year if staff, faculty and students turn off the technology at the end of the day.

"The savings could be larger," he said. "We're not even talking about copiers, and every school has at least one of those."

Board members liked the sound of greater savings and suggested district officials develop procedures to encourage employees and students to switch off computers when not in use.

Sedgefield Elementary School makes use of a tankless hot water heater that is only activated when a hot water faucet is turned on.

Go Green Virginia

One in a continuing series of stories about Virginia local governments promoting environmental responsibilty.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Reprinted with permission from the Daily Press of Newport News.*

Turning a city greener one lot at a time

Newport News Green Foundation transforming urban landscape into green oasis

By SABINE HIRSCHAUER
Daily Press Staff Writer

GOING GREEN for the Newport News Green Foundation, a nonprofit group founded in 1998, means cleaning up and breathing fresh air into the city one debris-cluttered plot of land at a time.

"We want to preserve a greener future," said Brock Field, the foundation's executive director. "Overall we want to make this a better community to live, work and play in."

The foundation, headed by a 15-member board and run on a $250,000-$300,000 annual budget, is buying properties -- 19 so far -- to preserve and create green space throughout the city.

"We are trying very hard to spread our efforts all across the city," said Field, who works part-time for the foundation. "They are all close to major traffic corridors."

The foundation, which grew from $100,232 in assets in 1999 to $2.19 million in 2004, according to its tax returns, gets about a third of its money from the city and the remainder from donations. Next month, the small group will tackle its largest landscaping project to date, a 1-acre dumping ground for used cars at the corner of 43rd Street and Jefferson Avenue that was purchased in 2002.

The asphalt has already been dug up and grass seed has been sown. Plans called for planting dozens of bushes, shrubs and trees during the month of January.

The group also plans to turn about seven acres at the corner of Bland Boulevard and Chatham Drive in the northern part of the city, its largest property, into a green enclave.

In early 1996, the Newport News City Council came up with landscaping and green space regulations as part of a long-term strategy to make sure developers and builders included landscaping and green areas when planning new projects.

The nonprofit foundation was created in 1998, after a study researched how best to handle the rapidly shrinking amount of green space throughout the 20-mile-long city. The growth of the foundation also follows an increased awareness of urban centers trying to strike the right balance between growth and environmental protection.

"It's following a trend we see across the country," said Flora D. Chioros, a Newport News landscape planner. "People have become more environmentally conscious and realize what we do impacts our community. Planting one tree or changing light bulbs is one way of doing it."

Nationwide, environmentally friendly building products and services accounted for $7 billion in annual sales in 2004, a 37 percent jump from the previous year, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

"Green building and green development has generated a lot of discussion and placed a new emphasis on green space," said Michael King, manager of community planning with the city's planning department.

As the foundation grows, it increasingly depends on monetary donations, but also need volunteers, plain hands and sweat.

Officials hope that in the future local organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club or local school and university groups adopt and help maintain some green sites.

Field, a lifelong outdoor enthusiast with 30 years of nonprofit experience under his belt, joined the foundation in November 2006 as the first executive director and only employee in years.

The group rescues often abandoned or unsightly properties by buying them or having them donated.

In 2002, the foundation bought a rundown, former car lot at the bustling corner of Jefferson Avenue and Main Street, tore down an aging, rusting building there, dug up concrete and then planted grass, bushes and shrubs and turned the space into a well-maintained, green oasis. The foundation also works to get conservation easements from people who remain the owners of their properties but get federal or state tax breaks for donating the easements.

The foundation's budget is mostly spent on buying, landscaping and then maintaining properties. The cost can range from $60,000 to $200,000.

"We are very diligent how we spent the money," said Alonzo Bell Jr., board president. "We are trying to spend the least amount of green (money) for the most amount of green."

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Reprinted with permission from the Daily Press of Newport News.*

Go Green Virginia

One in a continuing series of stories about Virginia local governments promoting environmental responsibilty.

Chesapeake Bay groups to serve up new ways to inform, get together

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By SCOTT HARPER
The Virginian-Pilot
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Go Green Virginia

One in a continuing series of stories about Virginia local governments promoting environmental responsibilty.

NORFOLK – THE last bagel has been served at the Green Breakfast. So too at the Save the Bay Breakfast. Organizers of the two local events, held for years to spread news and spur action on environmental issues, have decided to put something different on the menu.

Led by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the sponsors are replacing the bimonthly breakfasts with new forums intended to reach a broader audience, draw bigger-name guest speakers to the region, and recruit a new crop of activist volunteers.

"We need to take a break and pursue these other ideas," said Christy Everett, Hampton Roads director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Norfolk.

Not that the breakfasts had gone stale. Everett said they might even return, perhaps with a different environmental group serving up the Saturday morning doughnuts, hot coffee and educational debate.

But beginning this spring, the foundation is throwing its weight behind two other outreach programs. One will be called the "Blue Planet Forum: Exploring the Bay and Beyond."

To be held at Nauticus in downtown Norfolk, in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the evening lecture series will delve into Bay issues as well as larger environmental questions.

The first speaker is James Woolsey, a former CIA director, who will discuss national security and alternative energy development, Everett said. The inaugural event is scheduled for May.

Chris Moore, a foundation science coordinator, also based in Norfolk, will oversee the second new venture, to be called "Voices."

It also could be called Environmentalism 101. Moore said the class will go deep into science, fisheries, ecology and community organizing, with as many as 25 participants attending eight, three-hour classes on these and other subjects. They also will be asked to complete a volunteer project, such as building a rain garden or working briefly for a local nonprofit group.

The intense training is free, he said, but may involve some costs for supplies and materials.

Based on a successful recruitment program in Maryland, the course here should start in March and will be held at the new Norfolk public library in Ocean View, Moore said.

"We want to build a base of educated stewards of the Bay and the local environment," he said.

It is a much different approach than the breakfast events.

The Green Breakfast began in 1991 as a way for environmental groups to share information and to network. Few groups existed back then, and the basic need was to "simply get together and talk," said chief organizer Robert K. Dean, a former Virginia Beach City Councilman.

"Quite frankly, there wasn't much of any environmental movement around at the time," Dean recalled this week.

Advocates met at the Golden Corral restaurant near the Virginia Beach-Norfolk line and got discount breakfasts while they listened to speakers. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation largely took over the event when Dean moved on to other public interests.

The foundation later started the Save the Bay Breakfast, which was held on the Peninsula and sought to energize environmentalists north of the James River.

"I hope things keep going," Dean said. "It'd be a shame to lose what little environmental awareness we have here."

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Charlottesville transit station gains LEED certification

THE U.S. GREEN Building Council has awarded Charlottesville's Downtown Transit Station a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for New Construction (LEED-NC®) certification at the Gold level. The building is the first LEED Gold certified municipal project in the state, according to the city.

"Overall, buildings account for nearly 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. By designing and constructing this project to LEED® standards, the City of Charlottesville and its project team have demonstrated a strong commitment to the long-term goals of conserving energy and environmentally sustainable building practices," said Mike Mollica, the city's capital projects coordinator.

BARRY HALKIN

Charlottesville's Downtown Transit Station.

The LEED® Green Building Rating System™ is a nationally accepted benchmark for evaluating sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere efficiency, material and resource selection and indoor environmental quality.

"This huge achievement is just the beginning as the city continues to keep environmental stewardship at the forefront of efforts to be a green city, an important component of the City Council's 2025 Vision," said Kristel Riddervold, the city's environmental administrator. "We are working toward achieving LEED® certification for other city projects, including the new Charlottesville Transit Operations Center at Avon Street, and are excited that our first formal commitment to integrating sustainability building practices into such a visible project has been so successful."

The transit station earned the recognition for numerous design accomplishments. The building minimizes environmental impacts through site-related measures, affecting heating and cooling, energy and water use, and air quality. A "cool roof" system helps to offset the heat island effect by using materials that have high emittance and reflectance, resulting in a roof that stays cooler during peak summer temperatures, thereby reducing the building's need for "cooling energy." The transit station is designed to consume 40 percent less water than a conventional building, through landscaping, waterless urinals and hydro-powered flush valves.

Reduced operating costs are achieved through a geothermal heat pump system, where energy is generated by the earth's natural cycle of heating and cooling, reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Initial capital costs are recovered in about seven years, and heating costs are reduced by between 30-70 percent.

In addition to energy savings, a number of recycled materials were used in construction of the building.

The U.S. Green Building Council is the nation's leading coalition of 8,400 corporations, builders, universities, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations working together to transform the way buildings are designed, built and operated.

The project architect was WRT (Philadelphia / www.wrtdesign.com); general contractor was Daniel & Co. Inc. (Richmond / www.danielco.com).

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